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ABSTRACT

This guide describes a project (Teamwork Approach to Better Schools) developed to promote the establishment of a formal teacher support network in a variety of schools within a local support district. The model is a guide to newcomers to the project, helping eliminate startup problems and providing a sound base of experiences. The program began with the formative experiences of the five pilot teams in the project during 1985-86 and with a focus on teamwork. At the onset, pilot teams suffered from a lack of focus. As teams undertook the task of becoming a cohesive work group, they faced issues of leadership, decision-making, and general operating rules. As teams passed from the stages of forming and storming, task behavior became common and teams began to determine the overall focus. Finally, the teams' progress is measured and becomes an ongoing process. Among the conclusions are that the project helped to achieve better communication skills and a higher quality of education. (SI)

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DISCOVERY GUIDE

April, 1988

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C O N T E N T S

Prologue..... 1

Project Focus..... 3

Launching the Project..... 5

- Site Selection
- Start Up Sequence
- School Team Selection

Team Start Up..... 9

- Skills & Processes

Back At School..... 11

- Stages & Roles
- Getting on Task
- Determining Team Focus

Getting Results..... 16

- Dimensions of Impact
  - Institution
  - Methods
  - Pupils/Parents
  - Association
  - Colleagues
  - Team
- Evaluation
- Resources

Discoveries..... 25

- Conditions of Success
- Potential Pitfalls

PROLOGUE

Beginning with A Nation at Risk and subsequent reports on the status of public schools, *reform* of public schooling became THE educational buzz word of the eighties. This movement went beyond the accountability movement of the previous decade with a plethora of proposals on the qualification of those teachers and students who would be allowed to remain in classrooms. The proposals included new legislative mandates for the testing of both students and teachers, new certificate standards, merit pay, extended school days, required grade point averages, alternative certification, and curriculum mandates.

While much of what occurred at the national and state levels was politically motivated, the teaching profession took the criticism to heart. The organized profession was angered by such "other directed" reform and screamed for help from NEA and its state affiliates to stem the tide to return the profession to a position of authority on school matters. It became clear to the association that national and state reform while sweeping in scope, missed the need for anchoring quality education where it occurs, in terms of the daily environment, at the school building level.

The NEA national, state, and local affiliate network provided an ideal setting to test this belief and in 1985 a project was developed in collaboration with Florida Teaching Profession-NEA and Orange County Classroom Teachers Association (OCCTA), through the NEA-IPD co-operative grant program. The program description was intentionally vague, meaning it did not have a specific pedagogical or organizational design. Yet the goal was clear: *To seek the establishment of formalized teacher support networks in a variety of schools within a local school district/UniServ Unit.*

Association interest in such a goal stemmed from:

> *a desire to determine the interest of teachers at the local level, in developing a formalized program of formative professional staff development and assistance*
>
> *the use of an action research approach with a local Association as a pilot to decide future association directions, articulate start-up problems, and form a cadre of members experienced in formative professional development*
>
> *a desire to create new avenues of membership development and organizing with a program that comes from the local level and thereby shapes state and national focus from the bottom up, rather than one that operates from the top down*

Staff consultants to the project developed threshold criteria for pilot schools/districts:

> *that school employee participation would be voluntary at all levels*
>
> *that there was a manageable number of teams and sites allowing for frequent consultation and data collection*

that the district level management was willing to participate with and support the project

that the building level management was willing to participate with and support the project

that Association staff roles would be consultative to school based teams, providing guidance in defining their program needs and in securing assistance while not imposing a top down structure

that a cross-section of schools within one school district/local Association would be represented

Public Schools have forever been the focus of fads and trends in education. The reform movement of the eighties, however, can be considered to represent fundamental change in public schools, not passing fads. The pendulum of change will shift to the local level as the turn of the century approaches, giving NEA and its affiliates the opportunity to be a part of that fundamental change.

The challenge for NEA and its affiliates will be to capitalize upon a role of change agent to expand members' influence in determining the shape of education in communities and cities across the nation.

The TABS project contains the elements that allows the Organization to forge new relationships leading to professional autonomy for our members and increased influence through solid partnerships with other controlling interests in education. The initiators of the project hope the pilot experience has served to eliminate some "start up" problems for newcomers and serve as a model for others to duplicate.

This DISCOVERY GUIDE began with the formative experiences of the five pilot teams in the project in 1985-86. Now in its third year the project model that evolved from the pilot schools is working in nearly one hundred school sites throughout the country, involving hundreds of teachers, administrators, and support staff while enhancing access to a better education for thousands of students and parents.

It appears that the model developed by the pilot schools provides a guide to newcomers to the project, helping eliminate "start up" problems and providing a sound base of experiences. The results are both professionally and organizationally exciting.

PROJECT FOCUS

Developmental activities are by nature somewhat vague. In the case of this project the work to be done was defined only as "establishing a formalized support network within a school faculty". With a goal of allowing the practicing profession to design a program from scratch, the Association resisted imposing predetermined models or product expectations. At the outset team members experienced a high level of frustration over such vagueness, but now view that struggle as a hallmark of their success and essential to newcomers to this process.

After several months of struggle to define what each team was doing and subsequently the project as a whole, the teams determined that regardless of their specific school-based activity the project focus was teamwork and named this project the Teamwork Approach to Better Schools (TABS).

Being accustomed to top down directives, the teams' struggle for self-determination was real. The five pilot teams not only survived the struggle but developed the basis for this guide in hopes that new teams' struggles will be more easily understood and the chances of success will be enhanced.

As TABS continues to evolve it has three dimensions:

1) The collaborative model used to initiate a site based project.

2) The process of becoming individual school teams as well as the process of becoming a school district team.

3) The individual school products, changes, results.

The model used to create the project places all three levels of the Association in direct partnership with district level management, school based management and workers as well as the community interests they serve. The dimensions of this relationship require attention and nurturing for the project to be a success. Success at the effort opens new avenues of organizational development for school districts and the Association. One where the Association creates a change agent structure by fostering worker inspired innovations that lead to professional autonomy and collaborative relationships with other controlling interest in education.

The individual school products show how the establishment of formalized teacher support networks allow problems to be successfully addressed that have plagued the school and have been considered systemic.

Schools are microcosms of society and have their own dynamic systems in operation. The dynamic for each is different and therefore requires a unique approach to change for each school. TABS Teams have found, for example, that program restrictions may be hindering vital interaction among school personnel or that structure and school organization may be hindering student access to learning. Individual school products reflect the successful resolution of problems or effect enhancements in the school program requiring a consensus of the faculty, administration, students, and other school personnel to implement and that represent a "uniqueness" necessary for success at that school. The focus of these individual school projects is myriad. They include every aspect of schooling ---

curriculum, discipline, morale, physical plant, community relations, parental involvement, financing, tutoring, mentoring, dropouts, performance.

The sequence of events in initiating the project as well as the process for team development, developed in the five pilot sites, now serves as an ongoing model for new projects.

LAUNCHING THE PROJECT

SITE SELECTION

A decision to initiate a TABS project begins with the Association. Through normal channels of communication a local or state association may request assistance in initiating a project.

To date the project has proven successful in all kinds of school districts - urban/rural, wealthy/poor, bargaining/non-bargaining, large/small.

While there are undoubtedly many factors that can influence such a project the characteristics that do condition success are:

- o a concern for professional involvement in school reform.
- o an established working relationship between the Association and school district management.
- o a willingness for collaboration on matters of school decision making.
- o an ability to provide district and Association support to the project.

School sites are chosen by the Association in consultation with the school district. The characteristics inherent in the decision are:

to choose individual schools where Association members or leaders can assist project development although Association membership is not required to participate,

to select schools where the building level management is open to experimentation and supportive of faculty participation in decisions.

to choose individual school sites that represent typical student and community factors (socio-economic background, # of students, rural/inner-city),

to obtain a manageable number of schools representing a cross section of schools in the district (elementary, junior high, high school and vocational),

Early efforts to launch projects followed a sort of "word of mouth" and "hand clasp" approach, linking the necessary Association and District decision makers. By the second year a clearer step by step process was forming and now the launching of a project is most successfully carried out by following this chain of events.

TABS START-UP SEQUENCE

EVENT 1: ORIENTATION MEETING

WHO IS INVOLVED?

- o Local Leaders/UniServ Staff
- o State Leaders/Staff
- o NEA IPD/Region Staff

WHAT IS DISCUSSED?

- o TABS "Infopak"
- o State/Local Commitment
- o School District Management Style
- o Potential School Sites

EVENT 2: DISTRICT LEVEL MANAGEMENT MEETING

WHO IS INVOLVED?

- o Local Leaders/Staff
- o State/National Project Staff
- o Superintendent/Assistants

WHAT IS DISCUSSED?

- o TABS "Infopak"
- o Willingness to Participate
- o Potential School Sites

EVENT 3: SCHOOL SITE SELECTION

WHO IS INVOLVED?

- o Local Leaders/Staff
- o State/Nea Project Staff

WHAT IS DISCUSSED?

- o School Management Style
- o Association strength/need
- o Geography/Grade Level/Population

EVENT 4: SCHOOL SITE MEETING

WHO IS INVOLVED?

- o School Principal/Asst. Principal
- o Local Leader/Staff
- o School Assn. Member/Leader

WHAT IS DISCUSSED?

- o TABS Purpose/Focus
- o Willingness to Participate
- o TABS "Infopak"

EVENT 5: SCHOOL TEAM SELECTION

WHO IS INVOLVED?

- o Local Leader/Staff

- o School Association Contact
- o Small Interested Group or Entire Faculty
- o State/Nea Staff (If Necessary)

WHAT IS DISCUSSED?

- o TABS "Infopak"
- o Voluntary Participation
- o Incentive/Benefit to Participate
- o Team Make-up
  - -representative of school
  - -grade level/ethnicity/time
  - -academic/nonacademic
  - -special expertise/size

EVENT 6: LOCAL TABS START-UP MEETING

WHO IS INVOLVED?

- o All TABS Teams Volunteers
- o Local Leaders/Staff
- o State/NEA Staff as Needed
- o Trainer/Consultant

WHAT IS DISCUSSED?

- o Dynamics of Team Building
- o Goal Setting
- o Problem Solving
- o Data Gathering
- o School Project Focus

SCHOOL TEAM SELECTION

Setting up the school working team requires careful consideration and raises questions to be answered in advance:

How will participants be chosen?

On what basis will volunteers be excluded?

How big/small do we want the team to be?

What similarities or differences do we want reflected on the team?

Will participants be willing to contribute time and commitment to the process and work?

Are team participants reflective of the student body and personnel of the school?

Voluntary participation in the project was a pre-condition. However, selection of teams followed several different paths. A general plea to the faculty for volunteers, one to one solicitation by a primary Association contact in the school,

use of existing school teams -(interdisciplinary grade level faculty advisory) were common methods of soliciting volunteers.

No single method is considered to be preferable, in fact all options can be combined to achieve team selection.

Similarities and differences in team make-up refers to the diversity or breadth of representation on the team compared with the school profile. While homogeneity may increase team cohesiveness at the outset, if the team is to impact the school as a whole and a substantial cross section of students, then ensuring a broad representation of grade level, academic background, faculty experience and ethnicity is desirable.

The size of the team should also be carefully considered. As a beginning point for the TABS project the Association arbitrarily chose team size to be three to five teachers at each site. With new sites, it may depend on the size of the school or the number of faculty willing to participate. In some cases, with the start up of the project, interest at the school site exceeded the recommended team size and a "core team" made the decision to add more team members or to create several subteams with core team members as liaison to the subteam. More recent projects recommend that a five to seven member core team is an effective number. A team with more members may have difficulty scheduling meetings and functioning effectively, while a team with fewer members may not have enough workers or represent the facets necessary for whole school impact.

Avoiding conflict in the selection process is important, therefore exclusion of those who have volunteered cannot be arbitrary or simply based on personality. Start-up groups may want to address the problem by controlling how potential participants are approached or through predetermined team size. For example, a presentation to the whole faculty may produce a large number of interested persons. A meeting with that group will likely reduce the number, however, if the number far exceeds a manageable size some criteria will have to be applied, commitment, time and well balanced representation seem to be key factors. Generally, a school interested in such a project can self-determine who will be excluded without hurting feelings and dooming the team as a "clique" before it's even off the ground. Once a core team is established and functioning, expansion to additional team members, subteams, or concentric teams within the school will be fairly easy.

The role of the Principal and Assistant Principals also must be considered. In some cases the school based management is invited to participate as a team member, in others the role is a consultative one -- discussing issues with and advising the team as needed and for other schools the teams operate very independently, simply keeping the administration informed.

No one way seems to be better than others, what is important is that lines of communication are open and functional. The role of the administration with the team is decided by each school and usually is reflective of communication patters and management style in existence within the school. However, the focus should remain on <u>faculty</u> decision-making.

TEAM STARTUP

SKILLS & PROCESSES

At the onset, pilot teams suffered from a lack of focus. The Associations commitment to allow them to develop their own program led to pleas for direction and frustration about how to proceed without a previously defined framework.

While it was clear the teams needed help in finding their way, the Association resisted providing answers because that very struggle for identity and clarity of purpose was essential to further growth.

After a few months, teams developed an identity and were able to articulate areas where skills would be helpful. The areas included:

Team Building
Leadership Styles
Conflict Resolution
Group Dynamics
Decision Making
Communication
Problem Solving & Goal Setting

The need for skills and training arose as teams experienced difficulty in one or more of these areas. Pilot teams received training upon request. Over a five month period teams were trained in each of the identified areas but concluded that new teams' struggles would be much easier if all training was provided at the outset.

Participants now receive a common base of orientation with products developed during the three year pilot phase--The Discovery Guide, The Infopak, The Organizing Guide and Start Up Training. This intensive 8-10 hour session focuses on skill building for team effectiveness.

Successful expansion has proven that when teams have this experience prior to working on a project they are more focused, are prepared to anticipate and handle problems and move more quickly to define goals and set plans into action.

As teams undertake the task of becoming a cohesive work group they face issues of leadership within the group, methods of decision making, meeting time and general operating rules.

Pilot teams discovered that each team member brings different information and experitse to the group A facilitator or group leader may be elected by the group, appointed by consensus, or volunteer for the job. Another possibility is that no single team member will be "the" leader and leadership will be a shared responsibility, rotating around the group membership as needs arise or individual members' expertise becomes apparent.

Whichever method is chosen, facilitating group work includes:

* managing group tasks
* delegation skills
* sensitivity to individual and group needs

- keeping the group and its work organized
- reporting on the group's progress
- liaison between management and team members

At the outset this role might be assumed by an Association activist that helped get the school involved. However, once the team starts to work, others may be recognized by the group as the leader or leadership may shift depending on time, expertise, availability. TABS team members found themselves developing new confidence and expertise so that leadership from all group members evolved over time. Once the group is functioning if one person is burdened with all the leadership responsibility, the group may flounder waiting on the leader to do all things and burn-out may occur for the leader and group members as well. Most teams prefer sharing leadership tasks with each member assuming responsibility for the group's overall success.

An absolute necessity for team work and success is time! The amount varies but structured meeting time during the work day is key to the teaming process. Other time may include out of school research, typing, or reading and will depend on the individual team member commitment. TABS team members personal time ranged from almost none to a substantial number of after school or weekend events.

While building level management commitment is essential, active support seemed to make the difference in the amount of time teams have during the work day for teaming activities. For example, schedules may have to be changed to accommodate a common planning period for all team members. Arranging so much duty time for the project became an immediate hurdle for TABS teams, even with management cooperation. In some cases the preferred common planning period was an impossibility and in fact working out a time to meet became the major focus of one school. When teams cover a large and unique student body or when members do not share a common planning period, time to meet will be more difficult. Through district and school based management support, re-scheduling or even providing substitutes can be arranged to provide a regular and frequent time to meet. It may be as simple as relieving participants from mundane duty (bus, bathroom, hall patrol) once a week. Teams determine their own meeting schedule and how much time they can spend. Depending on the nature of their project or the structure of the team (i.e. core team, sub teams) the team may meet only quarterly, every two weeks, others meet weekly. Most teams find time to meet during regular duty time. However, when local school conditions do not allow for meeting during regular duty time the Association must work to provide resources to release teachers, provide substitutes or provide supplementary compensation.

BACK AT SCHOOL

STAGES & ROLES

All teams go through clear stages of development in becoming an effective work group. As described by B. W. Tuckman, Psychological Bulletin, 1965, the stages are:

Form, characterized by testing and dependence
Storm, characterized by intrateam conflict
Norm, characterized by team cohesion
Perform, characterized by insight, self change, and task accomplishment

The stages are inevitable, and while TABS teams' start up training helps them move through the stages more quickly, teams need close supervision and nuturing during the early stages.

This critical role of nuturing teams through development may be performed by an Association leader or staff. However, it is important that the state and local Associations plan in advance for who will perform the role and how. The role involves frequent communication with teams through written and telephone communication, on site visits, and joint team meetings. Teams often ask for research, exemplary programs, or access to other support necessary to plan and implement individual projects.

GETTING ON TASK

As teams pass from the stages of forming and storming, task behavior becomes common. Teams begin to pull together to determine an overall focus.

For the team to have focus and commitment, it must choose a problem that's commonly shared by all team members or the school - one that would make a difference if some change occurred. TABS teams approached determining what problems to address in many different ways. Some teams had existing data to support a particular concern, others collected data and still others simply brainstormed and then chose a problem from a list. Several teams reported that difficulty in getting a clear problem definition hindered their progress toward establishing goals, determining chances of success, and deciding on goal directed activities.

When teams experience severe difficulty with this process, it can jeopardize continuation of the project at that school. Generally an intervention from the Association can get them back on task or clear roadblocks for continued progress. Often teams bog down here when the focus is too big -- too generic for specific step by step planning, when the list of potential activities is too long and unprioritized or when the team is still in the "storming" stage.

DETERMINING TEAM FOCUS

Some teams have spent several months just deciding what to do. In this situation teams found this process most effective and helpful:

Clear problem definition - describe the situation;be very specific; brainstorm until the group reaches consensus on "Aha! That's It!"; write it down.

Ultimate resolution -there may be several answers; explore all possibilities; think of them as targets;be sure the results are measurable, specific and time certain; write it down.

Chance of success - envision the benefits of resolution identify obstacles; will it make a difference; write it down.

Determine resources - skills and knowledge available; what will be needed; write it down.

Develop proposals - list activities necessary to succeed;plan to be flexible; decide when,who and how; write it down.

Commitment - seek a firm and abiding commitment from each team member... write it down!

Other teams feel that searching for "problems" is destructive to the school environment. These teams approach determining focus by seeking areas for enhancement or expanding teacher creativity within a well functioning school.

Whether it's called problem solving or enhancement the process and methods are the same. Teams move on to work toward accomplishing their goals and are in the "performing" stage of team development.

Teams are encouraged to use a variety of work methods to accomplish activities and goals. Teams rely on members expertise, consultants, staff development and research. All methods can be sorted into four major categories:

* Data Collection
* Process/Analysis
* Public Relations
* Implementation

Data Collection Activities include:

* Research
* Reading
* Video Tapes
* Audio-Tapes
* Observation
* Journal keeping/Notebooks
* Other school/program visitations
* Survey/Needs Assessments
* Training/workshops
* Evaluation

Process/Analysis activities include:

- Large Group Meetings (all TABS teams at once)
- Small Group Meetings (individual school teams)
- Sub-Group Meetings (within school teams)
- Individual Meetings (one on one)
- Maximizing time by sharing/dividing tasks and reporting back to the whole group
- Brainstorming
- Case Studies
- Socializing
- Training/workshops
- Data compilation/Clerical work
- Setting deadlines

Public Relation activities include:

- Fund Raising
- Flow charts/Graphics
- Faculty Presentations
- Management Presentations
- Community Presentations - school volunteers, parent conferences, business/school partnerships, Association presentations.

Implementation activities include:

- Writing
- Developing Case Studies
- Trial Piloting of Project
- Building a wider support base
- Developing Products

While TABS teams are in the "performing" stage they recognize a definite cycle to project activities. The cycle can be described as:

- Exploration
- Synthesis
- Implementation
- Institutionalizing/Continuing

There are two important discoveries for a project's success in recognizing this cycle: factors in planned change and the cycle relationship to stages of team development.

PLANNED CHANGE	TEAM DEVELOPMENT
Exploration	Forming; Storming
Synthesis	Norming
Implementation	Performing
Institutionalizing	Decision to continue

If teams are successful in the forming and storming stages of team development the cycles of exploration and synthesis go smoothly and teams are ready for implementation within one month to five months of operation, depending on the

complexity of the project. If the team bogs down in the stages of forming and storming, they may spend an entire school year in the exploration phase of the cycle.

Teams find themselves totally consumed by the intensity of each phase within the cycle. However, once they have completed Implementation they are faced with indecision. The indecision is characterized by:

- o a loss of interest in the project
- o a desire to celebrate success
- o a need to rest
- o a need to assess the impact and effectiveness of their efforts

Teams must decide for themselves if the effort was worth it, if conditions exist to continue and if the process should be institutionalized in their teaching behavior or in the school program.

Many factors may effect this decision. Some teams lose members through transfers to other schools, leaving a fragmented team with the option of re-forming or disbanding. The lone transfer may start a new team at the new school. Most of these TABS members say their team experiences give them skills to become leaders in their new schools.

Another factor effecting the conditions to continue is the school management. If the Principal changes, the team must establish a new relationship and the Principal must decide to accept this decision making team.

Other factors may be school restructure such as transforming junior high to middle school, moving to a new school plant, or huge increases in student enrollment or number of faculty.

Individual team members may drop out or lose interest while others continue.

Many TABS teams have anticipated these change factors and have incorporated transitional plans into their long range plans.

Over the course of three years teams have progressed at very different rates. Some have shown little activity for long periods of time, others have been confronted with lack of support and difficulty within the team or school. Yet only one school has chosen not to continue in the project. All others have contributed to the expansion of TABS in the school district, state or within their school.

The Association plays an important role in supporting teams at this point. Helping teams re-group and institutionalizing the project requires action by the Association.

Several approaches have proven to help keep teams on track.

Hold a celebration dinner.
Have a project sharing meeting.
Give recognition/awards.
Give teams time to rest.
Conduct new training

Many Associations have found it important to include management and school district officials in these activities which leads to access of additional resources, institutionalizing worthy programs and assisting in project expansion.

Once teams acknowledge their success and pat themselves on the back, they are ready for renewal, to take their successful experiences and apply them to new projects and new professional roles.

Within school districts expansion efforts have followed a pattern of adopting feeder schools to existing TABS schools and mentoring by existing TABS teams. When teams or Associations decide to expand, existing teams become facilitators and advisors to new teams. This process has proven successful in expansion from the initial five sites to nearly one hundred nationwide.

GETTING RESULTS

DIMENSIONS OF "IMPACT"

TABS teams determine their own project direction and may confine their efforts to only a few classrooms or a single program or problem within the school. Others produce sweeping schoolwide results and have implications for the whole district.

Teams are asked to consider what impact their project activities have on the whole school and the community it serves.

The following describes TABS teams "impact" on these audiences:

Institution

This dimension is defined as changes in the school's physical plant, organization or program. Several TABS teams efforts have substantially altered this area. For example, Berg Jones Elementary School in Monroe, Louisiana wanted a playground. That initial goal led to a five year plan for a complete sports complex. With the TABS team as the driving force this project has become a community wide effort involving businesses, universities, the school board and parents.

Nova School in Madison County, Tennessee is currently working on plans to acquire and use A-V equipment with a long range plan for a gym at the school.

Pulaski Elementary School in Tennessee needed substantial restructuring for a more efficient school program. A needs assessment among the faculty produced six areas where changes were needed. Now six TABS teams have created a smooth operation. Activities include building a teacher workroom, sequencing skills in the science curriculum, revising the school handbook, promoting faculty morale and establishing intraschool communications calendars. Current plans are underway for a much needed restroom facility on a forty classroom wing of the school.

Apopka Middle School in Orlando, Florida has eight TABS teams which work on morale, sharing innovative teaching ideas, discipline, "at risk" students, an in-school teacher center and improving faculty restroom facilities.

Jackson Middle School in Orlando, Florida spent a year diagnosing existing discipline practices at their school. Faculty members were inconsistent in their approach to discipline and students who were performing poorly already were spending more time in the Principal's office or suspended than in class. The TABS team convinced the faculty to adopt and implement a new school wide discipline program which eliminated many office referrals and made students more responsible for their behavior. Now in its third year the team has done away with lockers and eliminated bellringing for class dismissal. Next they plan to undertake revising teacher administrative duty and the school schedule.

Mid Florida Technical Institute in Orlando, Florida is a Competency Based Vocational School with 35,000 adult students. The staff has 250 teachers, some part-time and night instructors. It is the training school for area fire and police as well as Disney, AT&T, and Martin Marietta.

Many Mid Florida Tech instructors are trades specialists having no formal education degrees. The TABS Team at Mid Florida Tech has organized one building on campus which houses six programs, 15 full time instructors, and 30 adjunct instructors.

Each semester the building elects a chairperson and meets regularly conducting business using Roberts Rules of Order. TABS participation has let to more open communication with the administration and support for these instructors.

TABS participants share teaching techniques, student enrollment processes, and class loads. They are currently awaiting funding of a teaching/resource center through the schools internal budgeting process.

At North Asheboro Middle School in North Carolina, TABS operates as part of a Teacher-Administrator Management Team. The Management Team, elected by the faculty, shares in decision making on all facets of North Asheboro's program. Teachers have flexibility to reassign students among themselves, determine the communicable disease policy and enrichment classes. The TABS project has focused on improving the odds for "at risk" students. An initial planning session resulted in 86 ideas for improving the chances of high risk kids to complete high school. One outgrowth has been a Fitness Club and an in school weight room where kids no only workout physically, but develop improved self-image and self-confidence.

Methods

This dimension is defined as changes in teaching practice, curriculum, or school decision making.

Almost all TABS teams are recognized as a problem solving force within the school. Their efforts to gather information from and involve all faculty in the project leads to improved communication and increased faculty participation. The methodology of relying on voluntary participation gets more results than administrative mandates.

Several projects have resulted in new teaching methods and curriculum improvements.

Tildenville Elementary School in Orlando, Florida felt the state mandated Beginning Teacher Program offered little to first year teachers to develop good teaching techniques. They also felt that traditional evaluation and observation methods missed important dynamics of teaching that could lead to improved performance if built into the system in a non-threatening way.

As experienced teachers (from 5 to 25 years experience) they decided to be the control group to test this premise. They studied existing evaluation and observation instruments, then created one of their own. They incorporated pre and post observation conferences and video tapes, along with a simple but tough rating criteria. During the next several months they observed each other's teaching techniques. The team members assignments involved primary grades, P.E., special education and intermediate grades. They discovered the obvious difficulties of trust, individual interpretation and dislike for criticism but moreover they found real benefit in learning from each other; adopting new techniques and being willing to change based on feedback from trusted peers.

Milwee Middle School in Seminole County, Florida created a special reading time for students, provided time for teacher-student advisory sessions, and eliminated classroom interruptions for non academic activity. The TABS team found more

than 35 non academic activities occurring during regular class time. While important to overall school functioning, these interruptions were destructive to the instructional program. The team reorganized the school schedule creating a ten minute home room to handle administrative tasks and a rotating seventh period to accommodate special activities. When students aren't participating in one of the special activities they engage in leisure reading and teacher-student counseling sessions.

Another Seminole County, Florida school developed a curriculum for Map and Globe Skills. Using the Social Studies curriculum as a base the TABS team at Wilson Elementary integrated appropriate Map and Globe skills, activities and resource materials with Social Studies in grades K-5. With the Map and Globe Skills in place, the team has turned its attention to transition activities for next year. They will move to a new school site with new faculty and students more than double the current size.

Several TABS teams in Louisiana, Tennessee, and Massachusetts have altered teaching practice through a school wide approach to discipline, focusing on interactive learning strategies, school based staff development or freeing teachers for more individualized instruction for students.

Delta High School in Louisiana provides In School Tutoring to upgrade students academic status to compete for scholarships or college entrance. The TABS team spearheaded efforts to create the program, find faculty volunteers and carve out time for sessions before, during and after school.

In Massachusetts a faculty is working to provide in school alternatives to suspension for difficult students.

In all these programs teachers are teaching differently and like it. Their students are more successful, they have support from their colleagues, and the emphasis on teacher decision making gives them freedom to operate as professionals.

Pupils/Parents

This dimension is defined as changes in instructional design, school environment, or access that directly affects students and parents.

The projects described in the previous dimensions were characteristic of those dimensions, but also had impact on students and often on parents as well.

For example all TABS projects to improve school discipline have involved students and their parents for diagnosing the problem and determining successful approaches for improved behavior. Many of the projects that focused on changes in the school facilities have enhanced program services to students such as school playgrounds, equipment, and gyms. These physical facilities created the need for better physical education programs or more access to audio visual equipment, a media center and computers.

Yet still other TABS projects have made pupils and parents the primary focus of their project. At Colonial High School in Orlando, Florida the TABS team is working with both parents and students to eliminate tardiness.

At Jefferson Jr. High in Louisiana the TABS team has two years experience in saving students from dropout between junior high and high school. The TABS team identifies 20-25 students who are at risk for passing and intercedes on their behalf with other faculty, the administration, parents and the community. Jefferson's TABS team says it feels like surrogate parents -- providing counseling, tutoring, social experiences and alternatives to keep kids in school. The first year produced eighteen successes out of 20 targeted students. Subsequent efforts have generated more faculty, parent, and administrative support for these students. Even student interest has increased. Students beg to be included in the TABS program. A current activity blends the student government association (all successful students) with 27 "at risk" students on a field trip learning experience to the state legislature and the state prison.

Bratt Elementary in Pensacola, Florida is teaching parents how to help their children learn at home, while schools in Louisiana and New Mexico are training parent volunteers to be helpful resources in school with everything from individualized instruction to clerical work.

Two Florida counties are involved in exchanges between middle school and high school faculties to ease transition for ninth graders. Leon High School in Tallahassee, Florida is creating a course in study skills for ninth graders to prepare them for high school courses.

Onachita Jr. High in Louisiana created a Parent Teacher Organization with meaningful interaction between faculty and parents.

Ivey Lane Elementary in Orlando, Florida changed the school's reliance on candy as a student reward to an academic reward system featuring successful compliance with classroom rules and student tutoring between grade levels.

Some TABS schools have developed a new school spirit with activities designed to encourage school pride, select school colors, or adopt a mascot. Still others have capitalized on community and state resources to bring folk art, story telling, and local businesses into the school.

Springfield Elementary in North Carolina raised $1400.00 through doughnut sales to fund their research for a transitional kindergarten program. In cooperation with the school district and the University of North Carolina the TABS team has provided staff development, and special assessment training for all school staff and have developed a community education program including a video tape and workshop for parents.

Association

Just as any citizen in today's plural society may feel disconnected from the events of the world, an individual school employee may be isolated from the mainstream of Association activities. While the Association advocates for all school employees through a wide range of programs, these efforts may not seem relevant in the everyday working lives of men and women in public schools. The TABS project links the interests of the Association with the interests of school employees. The results are providing new insights and opportunities for the Association:

The Association comes to life at the school. The concentrated effort of the Association to provide collaborative support to TABS means that individual schools

see national, state and local staff leaders in their school. Through the Association they share their experiences with other schools across the country.

- o Membership Increases.
  As a result of the Association's presence at the school, TABS team members and others recognize the value of Association membership. A few TABS schools have doubled Association membership but every TABS school has shown some increase in membership.

- o Participation
  In TABS projects where membership was already stable, the project has boosted active participation of members. TABS participants become a ready source of Association workers. TABS teams and schools serve to provide committee members, delegates to conventions, conference presenters or participants, and a work force for special projects.

- o Leaders
  TABS projects are also producing a new pool of leaders for the Association. Many run for elected office to local or state boards, or for local offices and faculty representatives. Others are willing to chair committees, or head planning efforts for TABS and other expanding programs.

- o Program Advancement
  The activity of some TABS teams may lead to implications for Association programs such as bargaining, public relations, community relations, political action and government relations.

Because their projects were fostered by the Association, TABS teams return to the Association for help when projects take a larger focus. They rely upon the established Association structure to provide support and they are willing workers for internal change.

New bargaining proposals have emerged allowing for school based decision making, grants to individual schools, academic freedom, release time for TABS activities and supplementary pay.

With the help of the Association TABS participants have become involved in school board politics, influencing district regulations, lobbying the state legislature and linking the Association with community decision makers such as the local Chamber of Commerce.

The collaboration with Management in this project characterizes the rather unique relationship this project embodies. The pilot experiences highlight how the bureaucracy can empower those closest to the action to create programs and cause change in the system that stem from the building level rather being top down imposed. The project has opened new lines of communication with faculty and administration at the building and among these individuals and schools with the Association and the district level management.

<u>Colleagues</u>
This dimension is defined as the teams ability to influence the administration, other faculty and support personnel within the achool.

The focus of some TABS projects has been to provide collegial support and improve faculty morale. At Dommerich Elementary in Orlando, Florida a TABS member transferred to the school and started a new team. After a faculty survey the new team focused on enhancing the professional environment at the school. The team sponsors workshops such as stress management, a faculty suggestion/complaint box, and social events. One particularly successful activity was an Amnesty Meeting where anyone could share a problem without fear of repercussion.

At Fort Sanders school in Tennessee all staff work with severly handicapped kids. The TABS team started "Staff to Staff" an informational newsletter which focuses on five areas of interest: 1) Community Resources and Events; 2) Sharing (strategies, techniques, materials); 3) Professional Enrichment; 4) Purely Personal; and 5) Problem Solving - Can You Help? They also feature Teacher and Teacher Aide of the Month. These activities have created opportunities for professional exchange, problem resolution, and recognition for outstanding personal or professional expertise.

At Apopka Senior High in Orlando, Florida teachers have a place to get feedback in the TABS team. At any TABS meeting a teacher may say "I failed miserably today in teaching photosynthesis to third period. Help me!" or "I tried the new discipline strategies and guess what, they worked!"

The faculty at Oviedo High School in Oviedo, Florida was separated by new plant construction, portables and incoming faculty. The TABS team published a school faculty directory, giving personal and educational background on each of the staff, subject area taught and location in the building.

Overall TABS schools report increased cohesiveness, more cooperation, a sense of professional control, greater trust and willingness to take risks. Administrators express satisfaction that morale is better, but they are intrigued at the willingness for self assessment, and risk taking of the faculties as a whole. Moreover, they are often amazed at the zeal for accomplishment and change in areas where previous attempts have failed.

While the lines of authority sometimes create conflict, all in all administrators do not feel threatened by TABS nor do they feel that the staff is operating outside acceptable channels. Many administrators report that TABS activities make their jobs easier. All TABS teams face the delicate balance between group decision making and administrative authority, but thus far there have been only two situations where the team and the administration could not work out an area of mutual operation.

When the administration fully embraces shared decision making, change happens more quickly and in a wider arena with increased school morale and higher productivity.

<u>Team</u>

The dimensions of team development have been discussed at length on pages 9 to 16. Individual team members find the process difficult but exhiliarating.

They report a comfortableness in trusting and relying in colleagues although getting there takes work. Others feel they could never work as well again without the support of a team.

Although it's hard work they feel a sense of accomplishment, professional autonomy, meeting student needs and the acquisition of new skills. The team serves as a respite for new and veteran teachers alike and although the individual members may change the process continues.

EVALUATION

Measuring the individual teams' progress as well as the progress of the project itself is an important and ongoing process. During the TABS project, NEA state and local consultants to the project evaluate overall progress by what you might call "temperature readings". Telephone conversations among the parties and teams simply ask:

How are we doing? Are the teams working?
What sorts of problems are they encountering?
Where should we go next?

Teams leave the start up training with three criteria:

1) keep a team journal or log;
2) report to the association frequently on team activities;
3) establish a regular contact person for the team

The constant and regular dialogue with teams allows the Association to intervene with management, provide materials or expedite team problems before they became damaging to the team process. As we approached the six month mark, the Pilot District set aside time and money for the teams to spend 10 days writing the project results to date. That significant time and money commitment from the District required some uniform set of evaluation criteria to be used by each team. All teams now submit written reports at least once a year based on these criteria:

1. Describe the process of team formation, operating rules, problem solving and goal setting methods

2. Describe your team's goal

3. Create a Bibliography of the resources used to advance your team's activities.

4. Analyze the amount of time both work and personal spent on the project, distinguish between the two. Describe the frequency and conditions of meeting time.

5. Describe the degree and kind of Administrator involvement with your team.

6. Outline the dimensions of impact of your team effort on:

   Institution (school plant, program, organization)

Methods (teaching skills, style, decision making within faculty, management style)

Pupils/Parents

Association (members, leaders, image, participation)

Colleagues (faculty as a whole, yourself)

Team (struggles, growth, change)

7. Describe the major activities used to reach goals. Include surveys, instruments, presentations developed.

8. Describe discoveries, findings, by-products from your team efforts. Describe actual teaching changes you've made. Include any hard evidence.

9. Evaluate your goal and achievement. Describe what methods you used for this internal evaluation.

The post project evaluations take place on site when possible immediately following or near the end of the school year. The results are synthesized, as in this Discovery Guide, and shared among all sites.

Teams have found a number of evaluation methods to be helpful in preparing individual project reports:

Pre and post surveys of faculty and/or students

Checklists

Written individual narratives/testimonials

Team Journal/Log/Notebook

Observed behavior changes

Student performance and behavior (including grades and test scores)

Descriptive feedback among team members when provided in behavioral, non-judgmental way

Descriptive feedback from administrators, school board members, parents, students, and other school personnel

Actual evidence of changes in the school plant or program

Project Products or Presentations

RESOURCES

TABS teams identified three essential categories of resources:

Material
Physical
People

Material resources include data, research, training, money, time and consumable materials such as paper, tapes, or ditto masters. Physical resources include a place to meet, equipment such as typewriter, copier, and computer. People resources include the team itself, administrative support, consultants, trainers, secretarial support, and the Association.

While the TABS teams had most of these resources available from the outset, they discovered two to be more important than the others. Time and support services were considered to be essential to the project. As plans took shape, time to carry out activities as well as to meet as a team became a priority. When results were developing teams needed equipment, typing and permission to record and distribute their work. The Association Grant through NEA and the state Association provided money for books, external consultants and workshops as well as group dinners and awards for principals and participants. The District covered meetings with all TABS teams as a whole through staff development funds and interceded with principals to help arrange time to meet and school visitations. The Association provided secretarial backup, equipment and a place to meet when those were not available elsewhere. Staff time to the project was provided by all parties to the project agreement.

New TABS teams continue to expand the base of resources by applying for grants or fund raising for specific activities.

Current state and national interest in school based decision making is leading to new sources of revenue for school improvement projects and Association gains in bargaining are providing an infrastructure for these projects to continue with the sanction of the Association and school district.

DISCOVERIES & CONCLUSIONS

Individual team reports reveal many interesting discoveries and findings resulting from the school-based activities.

Many of them may hold exciting possibilities for teachers' improved practice and enhanced student learning. You will find descriptions of these discoveries in the Infopak.

Overall project discoveries are more global in nature but no less exciting. We achieved our goal of establishing formalized teacher support networks in schools and within a Uniserv/District. Beyond that achievement, the individual school reports indicate that a formalized support structure fosters improvements within schools and perhaps within school districts.

TABS teams assembled a list of antecedents to having achieved their primary goals:

- Communication between faculty and administration is more than one way.
- Team members acquired better communication skills.
- Use of those skills improved and opened lines of communication among faculty, between students and faculty and between faculty and administration.
- The value of being a team member reduces teacher isolation and frees members to take risks, be more creative and experiment.
- Creating change may be painful and some may resist change.
- Better understanding of professionals outside our own grade or academic area creates a better learning environment.
- Increased awareness of school interdependence within the district as a whole provides smoother transition for students.
- Increased articulation between schools for smoother transition for students from elementary middle, high school and the role of the vocational education leads to problem solving for the whole district.
- Skill development is more meaningful with the opportunity for team feedback and on the job practice.
- Getting "self-identified" help increases teacher commitment to school and class goals.
- Teacher designed programs create better motivation for implementation than top down directives.
- There is a great deal of flexibility in arranging time and schedules within the school day.
- There are some clear conditions of success from the pilot experience.

- There are some potential pitfalls for newcomers as well as continuation and expansion of the project.
- Administrators are willing to share decision making.
- School focus and goals may change entirely.
- The Association can foster good education without trying to create good education.

CONDITIONS OF SUCCESS

The project requires structured support from all involved parties.

Building level administrators must be actively involved in the team's processes and activities.

Duty time devoted to the team process is essential.

Training and new skill development is needed.

Teams need external intervention and consultation.

Resources must be available.

Data collection and evaluation of team activities leads to trend changes and hard evidence.

Team relationships need nurturing and caution to prevent destructive conflict.

Teams need ground rules for operation (formal or informal) regarding methods of work, solving problems, getting and giving feedback.

POTENTIAL PITFALLS

Inadequate skills or pre-training.

Lack of focus, unclear roles may destroy/hinder team.

Lack of support/cooperation/commitment from any of the partners in the process.

Insufficient resources.

Lack of time.

New stresses need new coping behaviors.

Resistance to change may determine scope of success.